AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A conveyor belt for conveying an object to be portioned by a fluid jet, comprising at least a first and a second picket coupled to one another, the first and second pickets each having a length comprised of a sequence of geometrically shaped links disposed transversely across the conveyor belt, wherein the pickets are disposed in a nested relationship to each other, the pickets comprising upper edge portions that cooperatively form a conveying surface for supporting and advancing the object to be portioned, wherein the upper edge portion lengthwise of the pickets is tapered in the upward direction to reduce dispersion of the fluid jet during impingement of the fluid jet on the conveying surface, and wherein the conveyor belt further includes a connecting assembly for coupling the first picket to the second picket and a drive assembly for engaging and imparting motion to the conveying surface.

2. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the connecting assembly includes a rod, and wherein the first picket is pivotally attached to the second picket by [[a]] the rod inserted through at least one link of the first picket and at least one link of the second picket.

3. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the links comprising the first and second pickets have a leading end portion of a first shape and a trailing end portion of a second shape, wherein the leading end portions of the links of the first picket may at least be partially received within the trailing end portions of the links of the second picket, thereby allowing the first picket to be at least partially nested within the second picket.

4. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 3, wherein the connecting assembly includes a rod, and wherein the leading end portions and the trailing end portions of the links have apertures, wherein the first picket can be pivotally coupled in [[a]] the nested relationship to the second picket by aligning the apertures and inserting [[a]] the rod therethrough.

5. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the pickets are comprised of a sequence of geometrically shaped links selected from a group consisting of

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triangular shaped links, quadrilateral shaped links, curved shaped links, saw tooth shaped links, and sinusoidal shaped links.

6. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, ~~further comprising~~ wherein the drive assembly includes a first drive chain and a second drive chain, wherein the first drive chain is positioned along a first side of the conveyor belt and the second drive chain along a second side of the conveyor belt, wherein the drive chains are coupled to the conveying surface and can be driven to impart motion to the conveying surface.

7. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 6, wherein the first and the second drive chains have a plurality of apertures, wherein the connecting assembly includes a connecting rod ~~can be~~ inserted through the apertures and at least one of the links of the pickets, thereby pivotally coupling the pickets to the first drive chain and the second drive chain.

8. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 7, wherein the plurality of apertures are spaced a predetermined distance from one another along a length of the first and second drive chains, thereby substantially uniformly spacing adjacent pickets from one another.

9. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are linearly tapered.

10. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are roundly tapered.

11. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are concavely tapered.

12. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are convexly tapered.

13. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are step tapered.

14. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are tapered on one side.

15. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the upper edge portions of the pickets are tapered along a portion of the height of the pickets.

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16. (Currently amended) A conveyor belt for conveying an object to be portioned by a fluid jet, the conveyor belt formed from a plurality of pickets coupled to one another in a nested relationship, each having a length comprised of a sequence of geometrically shaped links disposed transversely across the conveyor belt, the pickets comprising upper edge portions that cooperatively form a conveying surface for supporting and advancing the object to be portioned, wherein the upper edge portions lengthwise of the picket are tapered in the upward direction to reduce dispersion and splash back of the fluid jet during impingement of the fluid jet on the conveying surface, and wherein the conveyor belt includes a plurality of connecting members for connecting the plurality of pickets to one another and a drive assembly for engaging and imparting motion to the conveying surface.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, wherein the plurality of connecting members each include a rod, and wherein adjacent pickets are pivotally attached to each other by [[a]] the rod inserted through adjacent links of the adjacent pickets.

19. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, wherein the links comprising the plurality of pickets have a leading end portion of a first shape and a trailing end portion of a second shape, wherein the leading end portions of the links of a first picket may at least be partially received within the trailing end portions of the links of a second picket, thereby allowing the first picket to be at least partially nested within the second picket.

20. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 19, wherein the leading end portions and the trailing end portions of the links have apertures, wherein the first picket can be pivotally coupled in [[a]] the nested relationship to the second picket by aligning the apertures and inserting ~~a rod~~ one of the connecting members therethrough.

21. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, wherein the pickets are comprised of a sequence of geometrically shaped links selected from a group consisting of triangular shaped links, quadrilateral shaped links, curved shaped links, saw tooth shaped links, and sinusoidal shaped links.

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22. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, ~~further comprising~~ wherein the drive assembly further comprises a first drive chain and a second drive chain, wherein the first drive chain is positioned along a first side of the conveyor belt and the second drive chain along a second side of the conveyor belt, wherein the drive chains are coupled to the conveying surface and can be driven to impart motion to the conveying surface.

23. (Currently amended) The conveyor belt of Claim 22, wherein the first and the second drive chains have a plurality of apertures, wherein the connecting [[rods]] members extend through said apertures and at least one of the links of the pickets, thereby pivotally coupling the pickets to the first drive chain and the second drive chain.

24. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 23, wherein the plurality of apertures are spaced a predetermined distance from one another along a length of the first and second drive chains, thereby substantially uniformly spacing adjacent pickets from one another.

25. (Previously presented) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, wherein the tapering of the upper edge portions of the links is accomplished by a method selected from the group of linear tapering, rounded tapering, concave tapering, convex tapering, stepped tapering, tapering on one side of the links, tapering along the entire height of the links, and tapering along a portion of the height of the links.

26. (Currently amended) A conveyor belt for conveying an object to be portioned by a fluid jet, comprising a first ~~drive chain~~ endless member and a second ~~drive chain~~ endless member, wherein the first ~~drive chain~~ endless member is positioned along a first side of the conveyor belt and the second ~~drive chain~~ endless member along a second side of the conveyor belt, wherein the first and second ~~drive chain~~ endless members are coupled to a conveying surface and can be driven to impart motion to the conveying surface; and

wherein the conveying surface is comprised of a plurality of pickets, each having a length comprised of a sequence of geometrically shaped links disposed transversely across the conveyor belt between the first and second ~~drive chain~~ endless members and in a nested relationship to one another, the pickets comprising upper edge portions that form the conveying surface for supporting and advancing the object to be portioned, wherein the upper edge portions lengthwise

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of the picket are tapered in the upward direction to reduce dispersion and splash back of the fluid jet during impingement of the fluid jet on the conveying surface, and wherein the conveyor belt further comprises at least one connecting member for coupling two or more of the plurality of pickets to one another.

27. (New) The conveyor belt of Claim 1, wherein the drive assembly includes a rotating member, wherein the conveyor belt at least partially encircles the rotating member, and wherein the rotating member is adapted to be driven to impart motion to the conveying surface.

28. (New) The conveyor belt of Claim 16, wherein the drive assembly includes a rotating member, wherein the conveyor belt at least partially encircles the rotating member, and wherein the rotating member is adapted to be driven to impart motion to the conveying surface.

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